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ABSTRACT

Different researchers have suggested a variety of definitions for democratic leadership. As there is no one generally accepted definition, it is difficult to categorically characterize a style as democratic. Democracy in a pure form is based on the assumption that no member of the group is superior to other members. In operation, no organization exists as a pure democracy and no leadership can exemplify pure democracy. Society and organizations recognize the person with superior judgment and special skill. People may discuss and agree on directions of action, but detailed activities are left to those to whom authority over these activities has been delegated. In considering leadership styles, there is a question of how much focus will be attached to the leader. Decentralization is an extension of delegation. Delegation refers mainly to the granting of authority and the creation of responsibility. Decentralization is the situation that results from a systematic delegation of authority. Decentralization of leadership increases opportunity for development of leaders; it does not preclude centralization of goal-setting, funding, and policy-setting. (Author/JG)

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THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM OF LEADERSHIP

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THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM OF LEADERSHIP

Styles of Leadership Exhibited

The "democratic system" has no one definition that will adequately identify it. Some of the expressions of the meaning of democracy are:

> Government of the people, by the people, and for the people.
> Government ... deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed.
> The rule of the people.
> The greatest good of the greatest number.
> Submission of the minority to the majority.
> Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
> Liberty, equality, and fraternity.
> The equal right of all to determine the structure and administration of the State.
> Respect for the dignity of the individual personality.
> A chance for everyone to develop and contribute according to his ability.
> Shared freedom and responsibility.[1]

Four themes appear in these expressions: people's rule, freedom, responsibility, and concern with the individual.[2]

In the Lippitt and White studies at the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station the adult leaders of the various situational atmospheres tried to create for the democratic atmosphere a situation in which:

1. All policies (were) a matter of group determination,

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[1]Ralph K. White and Ronald Lippitt, Autocracy and Democracy: an Experimental Inquiry. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960). p. 1.

[3]Ibid. p. 3.

encourage and drawn out by the leader.

2. (There was an) activity perspective given by an explanation of the general steps of the process during discussion at the first meeting.... Where technical advice was needed, the leader tried to point out two or three alternative procedures from which choice could be made.

3. The members were free to work with whomever they chose and the division of tasks was left up to the group.

4. The leader attempted to be a group member in spirit and in discussion but not to perform much of the actual work. He gave objective praise and criticism.[1]

Bogardus wrote of a study in which 158 eminent persons were asked to choose an outstanding leader in American life and history who illustrated the principle of democratic leadership, and to indicate three or more things which this leader did that were evidence of leadership. The things these people cited were: (1) increased opportunities for the development of other persons; (2) emphasized promoting the welfare of the group as such; (3) took the side of the weak against power and injustice; (5) consulted with authorities, even opponents, before acting; (6) leading, not by ordering, but by talking matters over with lieutenants; (7) carried out decisions by (a) sacrificing self and (b) exhibiting self-restraint and not giving in to egoistic desires and appetites; and (8) emphasized rendering service without expectation of reward. In summarizing the evidence Bogardus indicated that leadership was shown by the leaders' concern for the welfare of other persons, manner of living, manner of coming to a decision, manner of carrying out decisions, and motive.[2]

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[1]Kurt Lewin. Resolving Social Conflicts; Selected Papers on Group Dynamics. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948). pp. 75-76.

[2]Emory S. Bogardus. Fundamentals of Social Psychology. (New York: The Century Company, 1924). pp. 435-439.

The democratic leader functions as a participant alongside the other members of the group. He reaches out to people rather than down to people. The decision-making function resides in the group as a whole, with each member having an equal opportunity to participate. If there is irreconcilable disagreement, the majority defines the position of the group, but the minority retains the right to continue to speak and the fullest possible range of contrary action that is consistent with the safety and welfare of the group is allowed. The leader has influence to the extent that his position commends itself. He exercises leadership only so long as the group wishes him to. His weapons are persuasion and example rather than domination and coercion. His charisma is based on esteem that has been earned through recognition of his ability and of his concern for common group goals.[1]

Chester I. Barnard has been of significant influence in the development of insight into the democratic form of management. Barnard, in his book, The Functions of the Executive, advocated the idea that leaders can lead only those who will be led. It is the basic function; therefore, of the executive to gain cooperation of the workers toward accomplishment of the group goal. This is done through communication within the expectation of the workers. When one becomes associated with an organization he accepts the premise that the organization's purposes are consistent with his values and goals. He develops an area of expectation associated with the organization. He will then accept a communication as authoritative only when four conditions are

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[1]Harvey Seifert and Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. Personal Growth and Social Change; a Guide for Ministers and Laymen as Change Agents. (Philadelphia: The Westminister Press, 1969), p. 143.

simultaneously met. He must understand the communication. He must believe the communication is consistent with the purposes of the organization. He must believe the communication is compatible with his personal interest and he must be mentally and physically able to comply with the communication.[1]

There is developed a "zone of indifference" within which an individual will accept direction from one who has "authority of position." To whomever holds these positions individuals in organizations will extend "authority of leadership" so long as the leadership is exercised consistent with expected actions and within the follower's zone of indifference. Barnard said that there is no principle of executive conduct better established in good organizations than that orders will not be issued that connot or will not be obeyed.[2] When it is necessary to issue orders that seem to be inconsistent with one of the conditions listed above the leader must first educate, persuade, and/or offer effective inducements so that the issue of unacceptability of the order will not arise.[3]

The leader must set objectives and guide subordinates. Donnelly, Gibson, Ivancevich said that both the democratic and autocratic leader must do this, but the democratic leader encourages two-way communications between himself and his subordinates.[4] This is consist-

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[1]Chester I. Barnard, The Functions of the Executive. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), Chapter 12.

[2]Ibid. p. 167.

[3]Ibid. p. 168.

[4]James H. Donnelly, James L. Gibson, and John M. Ivancevich, Fundamentals of Management; Functions, Behavior, Models. (Austin, Texas: Business Publications, 1971), p. 193.

ee with Peter Drucker's statement to the effect that downward communication does not work or works only imperfectly.[1] At another place Drucker also said that all one can communicate downward are commands. One cannot communicate downward anything connected with understanding. This requires upward communications.[2] Understanding, according to Drucker, occurs after upward communication because generally the recipient of the upward communication has had experiences that permit him to relate to the communication while recipients of downward communications lack these experiences.

Within the democratic style of leadership different forms of participation may be engaged in by the leader. One leader may approach his activities as a vigorous participant persuading the group to act according to his viewpoints while another leader may try primarily to stimulate the group to participate and achieve group goals or to develop leadership in other members of the group. The first leader stresses transmission of a viewpoint, the other facilitating a process. One leader may be a vigorous participant in discussion while the other may be purposely silent. The second style has been called the "maieutic" (Greek for midwife), therapeutic, or developmental leadership.[3] It is used to pass responsibility from the leader to the other members of the group.

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[1]Peter F. Drucker with James L. Hayes, "The Literate Manager," An electronic tape cassette in the series Peter Drucker on Management. (New York: American Management Association, 1974).

[2]Peter F. Drucker, Management; Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices. (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 490.

[3]Seifert, p. 144.

Is it Democratic?

As there is no one definition generally accepted for democratic leadership it is difficult to categorically characterize a style as democratic. Too great a degree of admission to participation by group members in the formulation of goals, the setting of standards of achievement, and the time of participation moves the group style from democratic to laissez-faire or anarchy. Too much regulation of the group and group activity moves the group style from democratic to regimentation or authoritarian.

Democracy in a pure form is based upon the assumption that no member of the group is superior to other members. Carried to the extreme it would contend that the contribution that a moron could make to a group should be accepted as of equal value as the contribution that could be made by a genius. Democratic leadership assumes intellectual and emotional maturity on the part of the members of the group. In a theoretically pure democracy decisions are made by discussion, debate, and vote-taking. Discussion carried to the extreme leads to indecision. Democracy and individuality are thought of as being practically the same. Actually democracy is a social organization in which individuality is submerged to the interests and desires of the group. The theoretical decision making process that occurs in a democracy occurs as a result of people talking together. The limitation this imposes is that the group size must be small enough that the members may talk together.[1]

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[1]Franklyn S. Haiman, Group Leadership and Democratic Action. (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), pp. 56-66.

In operation no organization exists as a pure democracy and no leadership can exemplify pure democracy. Society and organizations recognize the person with superior judgement and special skill. Society and organizations recognize that some members do not possess intellectual and emotional maturity and people with capability take over the reigns of leadership. Society and organizations recognize the difference between abstract words and action. People may discuss and agree upon directions of action but detailed activities are left to those to whom authority over these activities have been delegated. Society and organizations select judicial leaders to whom they delegate authority to decide how general policies apply to specific cases, and executive leaders to whom they delegate authority for carrying out specific activities. Society and organizations recognize that discussions carried on indefinitely result in no action so limits are set, the group's minorities submit to the will of the majority, and activities proceed. In an emergency a leader may have to short-circuit the democratic process and issue orders in an authoritarian manner; or in a less urgent time a leader may necessarily become semi-authoritarian as an advocate in order to cause the group to make up its mind. In the democratic organization the individual must submerge his individual will to the will of the majority, and people must, in large organizations, compromise their face-to-face talking to each other by selecting spokesmen delegates.[1] Leadership that emerges within a democratic organization may not be purely democratic, but can pure democracy be?

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[1]Ibid.

Decentralization

In the styles of leadership there is the question of whether, and how much focus will be attached to the leader. Drucker reported that in the forties and fifties there was considerable resistance to decentralization because it was thought decentralization would weaken top management. He contends that actually decentralization strengthens top management. He does distinguish between business management and work management decentralization and contends that the latter is what is decentralized. That results in responsible workers, responsible work groups, and a self-governing work group. This extension of responsibility from top management to the workers results in greater authority for top management because it relieves top management of the need to perform non-management tasks and permits management to focus on the things it needs to do. Responsibility developed in the work force does not erode top management.[1]

Decentralization is an extension of delegation. Delegation refers mainly to the granting of authority and the creation of responsibility. Decentralization is the situation which results from a systematic delegation of authority throughout the organization.[2]

Decentralization is achieved in different ways. McGregor reported that Sears, Roebuck and Company achieves it by enlarging the number of people one manager supervises until he cannot direct and control them in the conventional manner. This forces him to

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[1]Drucker, Management, pp. 301-302.

[2]Theo Haiman and William G. Scott, Management in the Modern Organization. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), pp. 256-257.

adopt a form of "management by objectives" which is a form of agreement on what is to be achieved, with freedom for the worker to determine how it is achieved.[1]

Seifert and Clinebell's way of achieving decentralization is to use the "maieutic" form of leadership. In this the leader firmly refuses to play the "expert" role. His continuous refusal to direct by edict the actions of group members forces other individuals in the group to rely upon their own initiative and latent resources to achieve objectives. This leads to greater group centered behavior and less leader dependence.[2]

Centralization

Centralization is the concentration of interpersonal control in a few members, with the extreme case of centralization being that where one member has all the perceived control and the others none.[3]

While decentralization develops leadership qualities in subordinates and relieves top management from detailed supervision there are facits of organizational leadership that must be performed by designated leaders. There are some decisions that must be made at the top levels. These decisions involve such as capital outlay, new products or research directions or dividend policies. Operational

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[1]Douglas M. McGregor, "The Human Side of Enterprise," in The Planning of Change, edited by Warren G. Bennis, Kenneth D. Benne, and Robert Chin, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), p. 429.

[2]Seifert and Clinebell, p. 144.

[3]Arnold S. Tannenbaum, Control in Organizations. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), p. 288.

decisions are usually better made by lower level managers.[1]

The decision on whether an organization should be operated on a decentralized or centralized basis depends on several factors. Centralization is common in small enterprises. The chief executive of the small organization may be the only person who is in close touch with all facits of the operation and his close supervision may be necessary to the survival of the enterprise.[2]

In organizations that produce a variety of products or services there may be advantages in decentralization so that decisions involving the local product can be made as close as possible to the operating situation; however, decentralization can result in subordinate units increasingly resembling operators of small independent businesses. These local operations may soon be duplicating operations and services available in the larger organization. The local operators may also fail to use the specialists available in the larger operation and may become less efficient with regard to the larger organization than they would be under more centralized operation.[3]

General Motors was cited by Drucker as an example of a decentralized company that needed to have some centralization of control instituted when Alfred P. Sloane became head of the company. Sloane's organization became decentralized authority and centralized control.[4]

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[1]Robert Albanese, Management Toward Accountability for Performance. (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1975). p. 313.

[2]Haimann and Scott, p. 257.

[3]Dale S. Beach, Personnel: The Management of People at Work 3rd. edition, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1975). p. 181.

[4]Drucker, Management, p. 520.

In its fullest and richest sense democratic leadership is personal conduct which seeks to increase the welfare of other persons, which is arrived at by the combined judgement of those concerned, which eminates from a simple mode of living, which is carried out magnetically by example, and which seeks no rewards.[1] During the difficulties of World War II in England Winston Churchill exercised exemplar leadership. He offered his own courage as a model for the people. The democratic leader, then, functions a model, implying that in identifying with the leader one will best serve the ideals he shares with him.[2]

Democratic leadership produces results slowly. It takes time to train others to act efficiently. Tact and skill are necessary in getting persons to assume responsibility. The hopeful phase of this situation, however, is that in stimulating others to become leaders, they are being made new centers of influence. By putting responsibility upon worthy persons a leader may create a thousand other leaders.[3]

Decentralization of leadership increases opportunity for development of leaders. Decentralization probably should be used when possible. Decentralization does not preclude centralization of goal setting, funding, and policy setting.

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[1]Bogardus, p. 439.

[2]Alvin W. Gouldner, ed. Studies in Leadership. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), p. 407.

[3]Bogardus, p. 443.

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